

26 October 1977

Approved For Release 2001/11/08 : CIA-RDP80B01554R002700240001-0

Christening of USS John Hancock

Saturday, 29 October 1977  
Pascagoula, Mississippi

Remarks

Admiral Stansfield Turner, U.S. Navy  
Director of Central Intelligence

It is a great pleasure for Mrs. Turner and me to be here today. For me it is a happy opportunity to visit this extraordinary shipyard and to be surrounded by the sights and sounds of the Navy again. What could warm the heart of a sailor more?

For Mrs. Turner it is a rare opportunity to experience something few Navy wives can experience, yet, in so doing she can represent the deep commitment in the Navy which all Navy wives share.

For both of us it is a profound honor to help inject the spark-of-life in this ship which, for much of the rest of our lifetime, will sail the high seas, flying the colors of our cherished nation, protecting those American ideals for which our ancestors risked so much.

How appropriate that this revolutionary new class of ships should count in its numbers one carrying the name of John Hancock. Few men in our history contributed more personally to both our maritime heritage and our very existence as a nation.

John Hancock, a simple and poor boy, grew up in Boston as an apprentice in his uncle Thomas' vast mercantile firm. Earning his uncle's admiration and trust during many years of

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honest, hard work, he became manager and subsequently inherited the Hancock interests.

As the merchant prince of Boston and second wealthiest man in the Colonies, Hancock's business interests were worldwide. Ships were the means by which he conducted his business. And, it was with his ships that Hancock first began to assert his and his fellow colonists' rights.

The Boston Packet, a 160 ton ship launched in 1763, "solely for the London Trade" as Hancock put it, was the first ship to venture out of Boston Harbor without the stamped clearance which would permit her to clear customs on arrival in England.

In 1766, the Hancock brigantine, Harrison, brought the long awaited news that the Stamp Act had been repealed by Parliament.

The Liberty in June of 1766 was seized by the British at Boston on a technicality, setting off riots against the British, and demonstrations of popular support for Hancock in Boston and surrounding communities. Their action and the subsequent impounding of 3 other ships by the British led to the famous Boston Tea Party. Hancock was instrumental in the planning and execution of this act of outright defiance to George III.

Propelled by public acclaim to the Presidency of the First and Second Provincial Congresses of Massachusetts, Hancock went on to represent that State at the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. As chairman of its Maritime Committee he signed the Captain's commission and order to command the Providence of John Paul Jones.

As President of the Congress, to which he was quickly elected, Hancock devoted his full energies for over two years to the work

of establishing the new republic. His mercantile enterprises came to a standstill; his home occupied by the British; his possessions taken; his fortune used to support the emerging new government before it had funds of its own. There was no doubt what John Hancock was willing to sacrifice for American independence.

There was also no doubt where he stood. When the Declaration of Independence was drafted, John Hancock was its first signer and, for nearly a month, its only signer. His signature was written larger than the large copper-plate script he normally used on personal letters. Tradition has it that after signing the Declaration of Independence, Hancock threw down his pen and said, "There! John Bull can read my name without glasses, and may now double the reward for my head. That is my defiance!"

Hancock had placed himself beyond any leniency of the crown should the rebellion fail - and there were no assurances that it would not fail. This was August second; by mid-September the British had pushed the Continental Army off Long Island and had taken New York.

Just as with John Hancock the man, there will be no doubt where his namesake, the United States Ship John Hancock stands. We all hope that it will never be necessary to use this, or any ship, in battle. But, should there be no alternative, the John Hancock will not be found wanting. Her design concept as well as the manner in which she has been built are revolutionary. She represents the finest technology and shipbuilding skill available in the world today.

As the Soviet Union continues to make up for economic and political weaknesses through increased military strength; and as developing nations come to appreciate the importance of the sea in the balance of regional as well as world power; the competition for control of the sea will grow. The United States is in many ways an island, separated from friends and vital interests by broad expanses of ocean. We cannot permit any nation to exercise exclusive control of the seas, either by threat or fiat. Our peace and the peace of the world depend on the continued ability of all nations to communicate with one another by means of the ocean's pathways, to trade freely, and to develop those economic and cultural interdependencies on which understanding and lasting peace can be built.

The John Hancock, which we christen here today, and ships like her, represent our Navy of tomorrow. We shall be depending on them until after the year 2000 - a formidable responsibility when one reflects that building a ship today for the year 2000 is the same as building one back in 1947 to meet the needs of today. Nonetheless, the John Hancock has been built to serve the nation's interests as we can foresee them today and, as those interests change, to be updated at the lowest possible cost and in less time than is normally required.

I wish this ship and all those who will serve in her, luck and success. And I charge them to always have the courage of the man after whom this ship is named; to never let there be a doubt where this nation stands and for what it stands; and to do so whatever the personal sacrifice.

In the words of Mr. Hancock, "Let us convince our enemies that, as we are entered into the present contest for the defense of our liberties, so we are resolved, with the firmest reliance on Heaven for the justice of our cause, never to relinquish it... If we do but remain firm - if we are not dismayed at the little shocks of fortune, and are determined at all hazards, that we will be free, - I am persuaded under the gracious smiles of Providence, assisted by our own strenuous endeavors, we shall... succeed..."

Thank you.